

Vulnerable Veteran Protocol

This protocol addresses the needs of those veterans and current serving members who face particular difficulties in the review process, and whose ability to understand and effectively present their case or fully participate in the review process may be impaired.

Early identification and priority attention

A veteran may be identified as vulnerable at any stage during the review process. There are various ways in which the Board can identify a veteran who may be vulnerable, or at risk of self-harm or harm to others. These sources include:

- the veteran or his/her family member
- the veteran's advocate
- treating health professionals
- government departments or agencies, including the Veterans' Affairs and Defence Departments, and law enforcement agencies
- Board members, Conference Registrars or staff.

It is important that vulnerable veterans are identified as early as possible in the review process and that appropriate action is taken by the Board as soon as possible to manage their applications. Where the Board identifies a vulnerable veteran, the veteran's application will be immediately triaged for an on-papers review by one of the Board's subject matter experts. If the application cannot be resolved on the papers, consideration will be given to arranging an urgent hearing with a full panel or a directions hearing, depending on the particular circumstances. If a veteran is unrepresented, the Board will assist the veteran to appoint an advocate.

Hearing arrangements

All Board hearings are held in private. In listing a hearing, the Board will liaise with the veteran's advocate, treating health professional and/or Departmental Liaison Officer. Consideration of a range of factors include:

- the most convenient/ appropriate time for the hearing for the veteran and whether the veteran attends in person, by phone or video conference
- the attendance of support persons including the veteran's advocate, treating health professional or others such as family members or assistance dogs etc
- the panel composition (e.g. an all-female or male panel or members with specialist expertise)

Board members conducting a hearing will be specifically informed of any cases scheduled which involve a vulnerable veteran and that this should be properly taken into account in conducting the review. At any hearing, Board members are committed to creating an open and supportive environment. Questioning of the vulnerable veteran by members is to be done in a sensitive and respectful manner and questions will be formulated in a way that the vulnerable veteran understands. Additionally, the Board may consider taking evidence from family members or close friends. During the hearing, the Board will also ensure any vulnerable veteran is provided with breaks as appropriate. In every case the Board will endeavour to complete the review without delay.

Notification of the Board's decision

At the conclusion of any Board hearing involving a vulnerable veteran, careful consideration will be given as to how the decision should be delivered; i.e. orally on the day of the hearing, or in writing following the hearing. The presiding Senior Member will make this decision after consultation with the advocate, treating health professional or other support person.

If a decision is to be given in writing, either following a hearing or on-papers review, Registry staff will contact the veteran's advocate, treating health professional and/or Departmental Liaison Officer to make arrangements for the decision to be conveyed to the veteran. For example, a written decision can be delivered to the office of the veteran's advocate or treating health professional. The aim is to ensure that the veteran has appropriate support persons available and accessible to discuss the Board's decision, whether favourable or unfavourable.

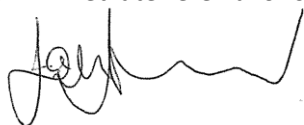
Generally, Registry staff will seek to ensure that decisions are not delivered on a Friday, or prior to a public holiday (or commemorative events such as ANZAC Day), or any other date that may be significant to the veteran. Similarly, the Board will ensure that hearings for vulnerable veterans are not listed on or around these days.

Immediate threats

If there is an imminent threat at any point in the review process, Registry staff may contact the relevant arm of emergency services in order that a welfare check be undertaken. Additionally, Registry staff will also notify the Department of Veterans' Affairs security team with a view to an incident assessment being undertaken.

Support services

The Board will encourage any vulnerable veteran to seek appropriate counselling or other support services after a hearing, or will recommend to the veteran's advocate that such services be sought. In locations where the Board is co-located near *Open Arms*, Registry staff, where appropriate, will endeavour to arrange an immediate referral or support.



Jane Anderson
Principal Member